**Farming in Australia today**

**Economic importance of farming in Australia**

Agriculture is an important sector for the Australian economy, generating up to [$43 billion in gross value each year](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/756B638E3405C430CA25773700169CB8?opendocument).

Farming employs around 370,000 people across Australia.

Although agriculture is not as extensive as at its peak in the mid 1970s, farms still take up around sixty per cent of all the land in Australia.

Farms in Australia have traditionally been family businesses, passed on from generation to generation. However, since the 1950s, international economic factors and changes in farming methods have led to larger farms being more economically viable than small ones. The number of farming families in Australia has steadily decreased and the average size of farms has increased.

Many modern farmers find that they struggle to make a profit and some are forced to find extra work off the farm to supplement the farm income.

**Types of farming in Australia**

Different types of farming are mainly concentrated in the areas that suit them best, depending on water availability and climatic conditions.

Livestock grazing activity, mainly sheep and cattle, takes up the most land in Australian agriculture. Sheep are mostly found in New South Wales, Western Australia and Victoria.

About ninety per cent of all cattle are used for beef. Queensland and New South Wales are Australia's main beef cattle producers, with the Northern Territory contributing to ten per cent of the beef cattle market.

Most [dairy cattle farming](http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au) is found in the southern states, predominantly in Victoria.

Crop growing contributes to over fifty per cent of the value of Australian agriculture every year. Wheat and other grain crops are spread fairly evenly across New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland.

Sugar cane is a major crop in Queensland and New South Wales.

Fruit growing is spread across all Australian states and vegetables are grown in all states and territories.

**Importance of technology in Australian farming**

Technology greatly impacts on farming in Australia. Scientific and technical advances have helped to make Australian farmers some of the world's leaders in efficiency and productivity.

For most of the 1800s, [most farming tasks used manual labour](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/dc057c1016e548b4ca256c470025ff88/3852d05cd2263db5ca2569de0026c588!OpenDocument) along with horses and bullocks. Today, powerful and technologically advanced machinery has replaced much of the human and animal toil involved in farming.

A number of [Australian inventions and technological advances](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/dc057c1016e548b4ca256c470025ff88/954f629c0adffbd9ca2569de0026c598!OpenDocument) helped the expansion of farming around the turn of the 20th century. Inventions such as the stump jump plough, the combine harvester and the 'scrub' roller helped farmers to make the most of the harsh Australian environment.

Irrigation advances, such as the discovery and use of underground water from the [Great Artesian Basin](http://www.nrw.qld.gov.au/water/gab/) and the development of irrigation around [Mildura,](http://www.mildura.vic.gov.au/) helped to provide much-needed water for Australian farmers.

The effectiveness of farming has also improved with scientific advances in fertilisation, genetics, irrigation and disease control. [Drought-resistant strains of crops](http://www.abc.net.au/ra/innovations/stories/s1159328.htm) have been developed. Animals have been selectively bred for the quality of their meat and wool.

The adoption of new technologies remains vital for farmers to continue to operate sustainably and profitably. Farmers are using satellite technology in a number of ways, and are adopting more efficient methods of channelling water to where it is needed.

There has also been an increase in the use of information technology on farms in recent years, with most farms having computers and Internet access.